You Need Self-Care!
Realistic, Effective Strategies to Cope as a Caregiver

Presented to: Oley Caregiver Webinar
Presented on: October 8, 2019
Presented by: Dr. Tiffany Taft, Licensed Clinical Psychologist
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Disclosures

• Speaker, Abbvie (Physician Education)
• Owner, Oak Park Behavioral Medicine LLC
Who Am I?

• Licensed clinical psychologist with specialized training in chronic medical illness
• Private practice owner working with patients living with digestive diseases, including those using HPEN
• Research Assistant Professor studying the social and emotional impacts of digestive disease
• Crohn’s disease patient since 2002, EoE patient since 2016
Today’s Topics

• Quick overview of psychological impacts of being a caregiver
• What is clinical health psychology?
• What are some treatments health psychologists use?
• How can you implement some of these strategies on your own?
Care for the Caregiver
To Do List

1) All
2) The
3) Things
Clinical Empathy

- The skill of understanding what a person says and feels, and effectively communicating this understanding to the person.
Clinical Empathy

• Is hard to maintain all the time
• Even professionals struggle
• Self-care is critical
Stress does not cause burnout.

A lack of support and resources causes burnout.
Caregiver Stress Syndrome

- Work of caring for others
- Grief over loss of health
- Chronic stress hormones similar to PTSD
- Physical + Emotional Symptoms

@DrTiffTaft
Caregiver Stress Syndrome

**Physical**
- Sleeping too much
- Sleeping too little
- Significant weight changes
- Frequent headaches
- Digestive upset

**Emotional**
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Loss of interest in favorite things
- Irritability
- Chronic sadness
- Abusing drugs (including Rx) or alcohol
‘The question that is raised now is whether people are living in a virtual world and whether our lives are devalued or lessened compared to before this technology was introduced. Has this affected the way we interact in our various communities? Has the new technology produced new communities that are more meaningful than the traditional communities that existed before?’

-Popple, 2015
Cool... Now What?!!
What is Clinical Health Psychology?

“The interdisciplinary field concerned with the development and integration of behavioral, psychosocial, and biomedical science knowledge and techniques relevant to the understanding of health and illness, and the application of this knowledge and these techniques to prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation.”
Contrary to what Dr. Phil implies, making meaningful change takes a lot of time and practice. But most people can do it on their own with the proper tools.
Self-Caring 101

• Take time for yourself
• Take breaks when you need
• Set limits on time you spend
• **Set boundaries with people**
3 Things to Evaluate
How is My Social Network?

• Who are the people in my social network?
  – Who can I count on?
  – Who might not be the most helpful?

• What online resources do I use?
  – Are they helpful?
  – How do I feel after I use them?

• How is my relationship with my family member’s doctor?
Am I Taking Basic Care of Myself?

- What do I do to de-stress?
  - Does it work?
- If I don’t exercise regularly, what is keeping me from doing so?
- How’s my diet?
- How’s my sleep?
- How much “down-time” do I allow myself every day?
Tools for Self-Care

- What have you tried?
- What works?
- What doesn’t work?
Mind Reading

Fortune Telling

Discounting Positives

Catastrophic Thinking

Should Ought To Must

Negative Filter

Dichotomous Thinking

Over-Generalizing

Personalizing

Unfair Comparisons

What Ifs?
No amount of guilt can change the past and no amount of worrying can change the future.

(Umar Ibn al-Khattab)
Got Guilt?

• Guilt implies I did something wrong.
• Guilt implies I did nothing to fix the wrong doing.
• Guilt implies I haven’t changed my behavior.
Got Guilt?

• If none of these are true, what exactly am I guilty of?
• Is my argument for my guilt legitimate?
• Are my expectations for myself reasonable?
• What purpose does perpetual guilt serve me?
Self-Caring 101

- RELAX!!

“T’m learning how to relax, doctor — but I want to relax better and faster! I want to be on the cutting edge of relaxation!”
Start with Diaphragmatic Breathing

Primary Targets
• Nervous System Arousal

Secondary Targets
• Worry About Symptoms
• Hypervigilance
• Low Mood
Practice twice a day
For at least 2 weeks before
Assessing how well this
Works for you.

It may feel weird at first
Especially if you are mostly
A chest breather

DON’T only practice this
During peak stress. Like
Bringing a fire extinguisher
To a 5 alarm fire
Yes, You Should Try Meditation

Benefits Of MEDITATION

- Reduces pain and enhances the body's immune system.
- Reduces feelings of depression, anxiety, anger and confusion.
- Increases blood flow and slows the heart rate.
- Provides a sense of calm, peace and balance.
- Helps reverse heart disease.
- Helps control thoughts.
- Increases energy.
- Reduces stress.

Photo credit: http://reallifeglobal.com/
Instructions to meditate

1. Leave aside any expectation you have about meditation. Remain open to see what happens.

2. Simply bring your attention to your breath and observe the natural flow without forcing it, just observe your breath the way it is.

3. Your mind might go crazy, bringing thoughts non-stop. Observe the mind, observe the thoughts, observe the mental chat.

4. You will start feeling your body, sensations arising: tension, pressure, tickling sensation, an itch, pleasant sensation, pain. Just observe them.

5. So, whatever you find: thoughts, worries, sensations, emotions, don’t judge them, don’t try to change anything. Just acknowledge. If there is fear acknowledge fear, if there is joy acknowledge joy.

6. Just observe, stay present, witness what is going on with no other goal than to see what is happening inside of you.

7. Every time you find you mind wanders into thinking, just go back to your breath & keep going.

Practice 3-4 times a week For at least 2 weeks before Assessing how well this Works for you.

It may feel weird at first Especially if you have a lot Of thoughts or don’t sit still easily

DON’T only practice this During peak stress. Like Bringing a fire extinguisher To a 5 alarm fire

Image Credit: Maria Allilaud
Self-Caring 101

• Relaxation is a **skill**
• Relaxation takes **regular practice**
• Relaxation causes **structural changes** in your brain after 8 weeks

Image Credit: Scientific American
What Else Ya Got, Doc?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
Think of Your Brain Like a Cell Phone
Think of Your Brain Like a Cell Phone
Tell yourself “STOP”

Notice what you are thinking and feeling

Take some breaths
First, Write it Down

What will help and be best for me, others and this situation right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What was going on around me?</th>
<th>How was I feeling?</th>
<th>What was I thinking?</th>
<th>What did I do?</th>
<th>Did it work?</th>
<th>What else could I have done?</th>
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Get a journal and keep it with you so you can jot things down as soon as possible after.

Keep your journal next to your bed to review or write down other things.

Give this at least 2 weeks of practice.
Modifying Your Thinking

- Stop, take a deep breath or 2
- Write down your thoughts
- Evaluate each one
  - How useful is it?
  - What’s the evidence to support it?
  - What are some alternative explanations?
- How much control do I really have?
- Is this a solvable problem?
- Am I underestimating my ability to cope?
- What would I tell a friend?
### Replace Negative with Positive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Negative Self-Talk</th>
<th>Positive Self-Talk</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting someone new</td>
<td>“They won’t like me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trying something that seems hard</td>
<td>“I can’t do it.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasting something you have never tried</td>
<td>“I won’t like it.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joining a group conversation</td>
<td>“I have nothing to say.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing something you have never done before</td>
<td>“I am scared.”</td>
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Writing as Therapy

What do you want to write about? Name it.

Rview or reflect on it – close your eyes, take deep breaths, and focus.

Ivestigate your thoughts & feelings. Just start writing and keep writing.

Time yourself – write for 5 to 15 minutes straight.

Exit “smart” by re-reading what you’ve written & reflecting on it with 1 or 2 sentences
More on Writing

It’s OK to write only a few words. It’s OK to write pages. Simply write at your pace.

Write as if no one will read it. This allows you to write authentically.

Don’t worry about how well you write. Write down what makes sense and what comes naturally to you.
"Acceptance doesn't mean resignation. It means understanding that something is what it is and there's got to be a way through it"

- Michael J. Fox
How Do I “Accept” Life with HPEN?

- **Being Present**: Focus on the here and now.
- **Acceptance**: Be willing to experience difficult thoughts.
- **Values**: Discover what is truly important to you.
- **Defusion**: Observe your thoughts without being ruled by them.
- **Commitment**: Take action to pursue the important things in your life.
- **Self as Context**: See yourself as unchanged by time and experience.
First: What Are My Values?

A value is a life direction, an internal compass which guides us throughout life. Values are different to goals which have an end-point. Values are often life-long. Perhaps what we would like to be remembered for, or written as our epitaph, our headstone inscription.

Values give life meaning and purpose.

To identify our values, we can think about what it is in life that is REALLY important to us, the most important, what gives our life meaning and purpose.
Focusing Energy on What We Value = Happier

Is it our relationships, e.g. to be a good parent? Is it our careers, connecting with nature, healthy living, community service or making a difference? Consider what legacy you want to pass on.

Having identified our values, we know where we want to go in life, the direction we want to progress towards. We might set goals along the way.

Knowing our values will help us decide how to react to stress and distress. In spite of how we feel, we can still move in the direction and service of our values.
<table>
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<th>STRUGGLE &amp; SUFFERING</th>
<th>RICH &amp; MEANINGFUL LIFE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problematic Thoughts And Feelings:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Problematic Actions:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What memories, worries, fears, self-criticisms, or other thoughts do you get “caught up” in? What emotions, feelings, urges, or sensations do you struggle with?</td>
<td>What are you doing that makes your life worse in the long run: that keeps you stuck; wastes your time or money; drains your energy; impacts negatively on your health or your relationships; or leads to you “missing out” on life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values:</strong> What matters to you in the “big picture”? What do you want to stand for? What personal qualities and strengths do you want to develop? How do you want to enrich or improve your relationships? How would you like to “grow” or develop, through addressing your issue(s) or problem(s)?</td>
<td><strong>Goals &amp; Actions:</strong> What are you currently doing that improves your life in the long run? What do you want to start or do more of? What life-enriching goals do you want to achieve? What life-enhancing actions do you want to take? What life-improving skills would you like to develop?</td>
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Second: Get Present

Notice Five Things
This is yet another simple exercise to center yourself and engage with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around and notice five things that you can see.
3. Listen carefully and notice five things that you can hear.
4. Notice five things that you can feel in contact with your body (for example, your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air on your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair).
5. Finally, do all of the above simultaneously
3. Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities

Pick an activity you enjoy such as cuddling with a loved one, eating lunch, stroking the cat, playing with the dog, walking in the park, listening to music, having a soothing hot bath, and so on. Do this activity mindfully: engage in it fully, using all five of your senses, and savor every moment. If and when your attention wanders, as soon as you realize it, note what distracted you, and re-engage in whatever you’re doing.
Acceptance Resources

The Bus Technique: https://www.theemotionmachine.com/the-mindbus-technique/


The Struggle Switch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCp1l16GCXI

The Sushi Tray: https://youtu.be/tzUoXJVI0wo

Many other short exercises to try: http://eightfoldcounseling.com/act-metaphors/
Another Buzzword: Resilience

Resilience is very different than being numb. Resilience means you experience, you feel, you fail, you hurt. You fall. But, you keep going.

Yasmin Mogahed

Northwestern Medicine
Feinberg School of Medicine

@DrTiffTaft
What the Heck Is Resilience?

- **Natural resilience**: What you’re born with, your human nature and drive to survive
- **Adaptive resilience**: ”Trial by Fire” or how we learn to change and adapt after challenges.
- **Restored resilience**: Aka ”learned”. Strategies to help tap into your natural resilience.
Resilience Resources

- https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/resilience-activities-worksheets/
- https://www.mindful.org/how-to-cultivate-the-resources-for-resilience/
Seeking Help

• If you’re struggling on your own, consider therapy
• Most insurance covers mental health visits without limits
• Ask any potential therapist about their experience working with people who are caregivers
• What does successful therapy mean? A good fit
Questions to Ask a Potential Therapist

✓ What is your approach to treatment?
✓ How many clients have you seen who are caregivers?
✓ Do you have any specialty training in chronic illness?
✓ How long does your typical client work with you?
✓ What strategies do you use most often with your clients?
✓ Do you accept insurance?
✓ What are you fees?
Start Today

• Write a note to yourself with the key things you just learned about taking care of yourself
• Use your smartphones to set periodic reminders
• Prioritize these like you would a meeting with your boss
• KEY POINT: DON’T DISMISS!
Important Takeaways

1. Being a caregiver is difficult and can result in caregiver stress syndrome
2. Intervention BEFORE emotional impacts become overwhelming lead to best outcomes
3. Most people are able to implement self-help strategies but enough time is needed before giving up
4. Practice anything for at least 2 weeks
5. Use the technology
6. Reach out to a professional if you continue to struggle
Thank You!

THE LAST OF HUMAN FREEDOMS

THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE ONE’S ATTITUDE IN ANY GIVEN SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES,

THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE ONE’S OWN WAY.

VIKTOR FRANKL

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